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An Interview with Johnny Calvin Brewer

How it came about

On Monday 25th November 1996, as a result of researcher and Dealey Plaza UK member Mike Blackwell acting as the middleman, I had the opportunity to meet and interview Johnny Calvin Brewer. Like most researchers, I knew Brewer as the shoe store manager who had seen Lee Harvey Oswald acting suspiciously on West Jefferson Boulevard and then ducking into the Texas Theatre a matter of minutes after the shooting of Patrolman J D Tippit.

The 45-minute interview was held at Johnny Brewer's house in a pleasant

by
Ian Griggs

part of Austin, Texas and researchers Mike Blackwell, Richard Bartholomew and Mark Rowe were also present. Brewer had no objection to the interview being tape-recorded and it quickly became obvious that he had already anticipated some of the areas in which I was particularly interested.

What follows is a greatly shortened version of the interview. I have concentrated here only on the part Brewer played in the build-up to the arrest of Oswald. In addition to that, he also revealed that he lived in the same apartment block as Carousel Club stripper Kathy Kay and knew her and her two young daughters. That, as they say, is another story - and is one which I hope to cover in a subsequent article!

The interview

ILG: "Right, John, if you would just begin please by telling me how old you were when the assassination of President Kennedy took place."

JCB: "Twenty-two. September 17th, 1941 I was born."

ILG: "Now you worked at Hardy's shoe store at 213 West Jefferson. What was your position there?"

JCB: "Manager."

ILG: "So you were in overall control of that shop?"

JCB: "Right."

ILG: "How long had you been there - doing that job?"

JCB: "Probably since August of 62."

ILG: "To your knowledge, was Lee Harvey Oswald ever one of your customers?"

JCB: "Yes, he was."

ILG: "So that obviously means that you'd seen him in the shop?"

JCB: "At the time that I saw him at the theatre, I knew I had seen this guy before - and possibly that's even why he got my attention. Not the main reason he got my attention. I did not place him until, I don't know, it may have been a month before. I could even tell you the shoe that he bought. It was a two-eyelet, crepe-soled shoe, model 8110, size eight and a half."
(1)

ILG: "Robert Groden has said - and I don't know a source for this - that Oswald once entered your shop, tried on almost every shoe in the place and



Ian Griggs (left) with Johnny Calvin Brewer

left without buying anything. Is there any truth to that?"

JCB: "No. He bought. He was very fastidious and meticulous - or just a jerk. I'm not quite sure which."

ILG: "And there was just this one occasion?"

JCB: "Just on the one occasion. Like I say, I didn't have a clue who he was - just a sale. Certain customers stand out in your mind and you try to avoid them next time you see them coming. He was a pain in the butt."

ILG: "So there was something about him?"

JCB: "Oh sure - yeah."

ILG: "Did he pay cash money - a normal sale?"

JCB: "A normal transaction, yes."

ILG: "How long before the assassination was that John? Can you remember?"

JCB: "That I cannot remember. I do not know. It was probably only a matter of weeks - but again it could have been months. I'm not sure. I don't know. I can only place him as a customer who bought that model 8110 black two-eyelet crepe-soled shoe for five dollars and seventy cents." (2)

ILG: "Okay, let's get on to the day itself - 22nd November 1963. You were at work in the shop that day. How did you initially hear about the shooting of Kennedy?"

JCB: "I was listening to a radio broadcast on a portable radio I had."

ILG: "I know this is a crazy question but is there any way of recalling which programme, which station, you were listening to?"

JCB: "A Dallas station. I have a feeling it may have been KLIF. That would be one of the stations that I would ordinarily be listening to, but I honestly don't know. It was just the normal run of the motorcade and all of a sudden you hear all the

commotion and then you hear something about shots being fired and then - you know."

ILG: "So it was actually being broadcast live. I see. What about Tippit's murder?"

JCB: "I also - now that was just a few blocks away. But I'd heard there was a shooting in the Oak Cliff area - now they didn't say anything about who it was. I don't recall that it was said that there was a policeman down, or what, but I do recall hearing something about a shooting in the Oak Cliff area. And just very shortly after that, the sirens of the cars all converging on Zangs and Jefferson or just going towards it."

ILG: "So you're interested, obviously, because it's close by your location."

JCB: "Oh yeah, yeah. But never ever connecting what happened here to downtown."

ILG: "Now, this is difficult. Can you remember when you heard about the Tippit killing - the shooting of the policeman?"

JCB: "I've never really thought about it."

ILG: "But at the time, there was no connection between Kennedy and Tippit?"

JCB: "Not that I knew."

ILG: "Fine. Was there, if you can recall, any description of the suspect in either of these killings given out on the radio?"

JCB: "In the shooting, I'm pretty sure it was the shooting, a description of a shooter. You know, it was - I don't recall if they said white or black. But I do recall a male, five feet nine, medium size build. There was no description of a shirt or a jacket."

ILG: "I understand. Now I know the layout of the shop - the way the door was recessed and the display panels on the sides. Now your counter

- your location - would that be facing the door or on the side?"

JCB: "As you face the door, if you were outside facing into my store, I would have been on the left just as you open the door. There were two swing doors, I recall. On the left there was a counter that was running parallel to the showcase windows. And then there was a centre aisle with the chairs - and the whatnots and the hose and socks and whatnot were behind the polished mahogany counter - it was running parallel with the left-hand windows as you're facing in."

ILG: "So you would be there, listening to the radio, and you have got a view of the door and the street through it."

JCB: "Oh yeah. There's the door right there. I have a full view of the front."

ILG: "Now we're obviously leading up to your view of this man acting strangely. When this happened, John, were you in the shop by yourself?"

JCB: "There were two other men in there. They were from IBM - they were in the neighbourhood. I had known them ever since I came there." (3)

ILG: "Customers?"

JCB: "No, they weren't customers. They'd just come in and kill time and lounge around."

ILG: "Right. Were there any other salesmen in the shop apart from yourself?"

JCB: "No, there were not. In fact I had planned to be off that day - except that my assistant called me in. His newborn was ill. I had just taken delivery of a brand new '64 Galaxie CL500 Ford and I had no intention of being at work that day. And it was parked out in front of the store and I was feeding nickels to it all day long, just waiting to get off. And they just stood around and talked, the IBM



The Texas Theatre and Hardy's Shoe Store (now Alicia's), photographed November 1996.

men."

ILG: "Now your attention is alerted to this character who is acting furtively in your doorway as the police cars are going by. Am I correct in that?"

JCB: "Of course my attention is drawn out because of the sirens of the police cars going by. And knowing of the shooting in the area. And I was actually on my way to come out from behind the counter to go outside, to watch out and see what was going on when this fellow entered from my left as I'm standing there."

ILG: "Ah - now that's important because I've never seen anywhere, in any book, which direction he's come from."

JCB: "He's come from the Zangs Boulevard direction, which is the intersection. He walked into the recessed area and stood - and we were looking at each other. And actually, I was a little annoyed because I thought it was someone coming in as I was fixing to go out. And then when the police had gone by he looked over his shoulder and then walked out on

to the sidewalk again, looked and then walked quickly but calmly - and I stood there, it couldn't have been more than five seconds."

ILG: "And he's walking in which direction now?"

JCB: "Towards the theatre."

ILG: "In your testimony, you said he looked funny. Those are the actual words you used. Can you expand on that at all? Looked funny - in what way?"

JCB: "Well, he obviously wasn't looking for shoes."

ILG: "When you left the shop to see what this chap was doing, did you mention anything to the other two fellows who were in the shop?"

JCB: "Oh yes, I think I said something. And I walked out on to the sidewalk - are you familiar with the furniture store?"

ILG: "Yes - Thomsen's. I know where that was." (4)

JCB: "And he was right in that area when I picked up again and saw him."

ILG: "Now you were suspicious of him because of his appearance and the

fact that he'd been in the recess of your shop for what appeared to be reasons of concealment. Is that correct?"

JCB: "Well, and also, why wasn't he interested in all the police cars going by as everyone else was? Everyone was out on the street looking - like right now, if a police car came by, we'd all be out there looking. That's the way it is. So that kinda struck me as odd."

ILG: "So that's why you stepped out of the

store and looked, and he's walking down and he's by Thomsen's and he's still walking."

JCB: "Uh huh."

ILG: "Okay. Now I understand he then entered the Texas Theatre."

JCB: "Right. I saw him go in." (5)

ILG: "Okay. And from your vantage point could you see that he went in without buying a ticket?"

JCB: "Well, you could see the cashier's booth which was out on the sidewalk. I didn't really know for sure whether he bought a ticket or not. I saw him walk in and that's when I went back and - I can't remember either of their names - but one of them closed up for me while I was gone. When I came back, the store was locked. I said I'm going to check."

ILG: "You got a feeling all was not right?"

JCB: "Right. So they stayed there and I walked up, all the time thinking what am I doing here? And I saw Julie, out on the " (6)

ILG: "Now you knew Julia Postal, didn't you? What did you say to her?"

JCB: "I said 'Julie, did you sell a

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ticket ?' and I gave her a description of the guy. She said no, she hadn't. She'd been out on the street watching. And I said 'Julie, I'm gonna go inside and see if I can see him - there's something funny.'

ILG: "You went in and saw someone, didn't you?"

JCB: "Yes, as I walked inside. Butch Burroughs. He was the concessionaire and ticket taker and whatever else and I asked Butch if he had seen anybody in the theatre and he said no but he had been down behind the counter stocking concessions and whatever. He had not seen anybody. And I said 'Butch, come on with me' and we went up into the balcony. And using the screen as a backlight we could see that there were no heads up there."

ILG: "So the balcony was totally empty."

JCB: "Yeah."

ILG: "Okay, in your affidavit on December 6th - two weeks later - you said that you and Butch checked the exits to see if any of them had been opened. Now can you describe to me exactly what you did and why." (7)

JCB: "Well first of all, I walked all the way down the left aisle and just kinda looked for somebody who looked like him but I still didn't see anybody so I walked behind the curtain - there was a curtain there - to the left of the stage and it was a fire exit and if anyone leaves by a fire exit it has to be reset."

ILG: "You push a bar to open it, don't you?"

JCB: "Right. It has to be reset. But it was still locked. Nobody had gone out. So I walked back up to the other side and walked out and I said to Julie 'Call the police' and I said 'Butch, you

stay here out front and if anybody matching his description leaves, then stop them - and I'm gonna go back to the back and the exit out on to the alley."

ILG: "Were they the only entry and exit points, John - the front entrance and this one fire escape door by the stage? They're the only ways out of the place?"

JCB: "Yes, out of the building."



COMMISSION EXHIBIT 147

ILG: "So Butch stayed at the front entrance and you were at the back down by the stage. Is that right?"

JCB: "I don't know exactly where Butch was. I just know I told him to stay outside and I would go to the back."

ILG: "So you'd asked Julia to contact the police and tell them what?"

JCB: "Just that there was a suspicious person in there. I still had no reason to have somebody call the

police. I'm not sure what the hell I'm doing here to start with."

ILG: "I've read her testimony and she explains that she rang the police station. She initially spoke to a woman and that lady put her on to a man and she told him there was a suspicious man there and would they come down. Now I understand that you let a lot of them in through that back door."

JCB: "Right."

ILG: "Now what happened? Did they bang on the door and say 'Police!' or were you waiting by the door?"

JCB: "First of all, before they got to the door, I thought it's dark and I don't see anything, well they turned the house lights on but the movie's still running. When the house lights came on I looked up at the balcony and I seen the police in already - plain clothes and uniformed officers. They'd come in the front. And at about that time, I see Oswald. Didn't know who he was at the time. He got up and walked towards the aisle on his right."

ILG: "He'd been sitting downstairs?"

JCB: "Yes, towards the centre."

ILG: "And did you recognise him as the man who'd been in the front of your store?"

JCB: "Right. He got up and he just took a couple of steps like he was going to exit and then he sat down again - probably not the same chair he'd occupied. One next to it or the next one. And about that time - and this all happened real fast - I hear them knocking on the door. When I opened the door they grabbed me and pulled me out into the alley and I explained to them that I had seen this man acting

suspiciously."

ILG: "Can I just butt in on one thing here, John? How tall were you then?"

JCB: "Six three."

ILG: "Six three - and we're talking about Oswald who was five nine. So there's not really a possibility that they're mixing you up. I mean you didn't fit the description of the fellow they were looking for, did you? Not at six three."

JCB: "No."

ILG: "So they grab you, put a gun on you, and what did you do? You tell them what?"

JCB: "Basically that I'm on your side. This person that you're here for is out there."

ILG: "These people now, are they all in uniform or are some in plain clothes?"

JCB: "Some are both."

ILG: "So they're a mixture of uniform and plain clothes?"

JCB: "Right. There were policemen on the fire escape and that. They were all over the place."

ILG: "Now the fellows who actually came in through that door where you were, that was both uniform and plain clothes?"

JCB: "Well it was uniform men who got up on the stage with me because you get up on the stage from there. Two of them. The first was McDonald. And there were others there but they were all standing back. Nobody was really converging."

ILG: "But you actually pointed the man out, didn't you? Can you remember what you said

JCB: "I said 'That's the man - in the

brown, in the checkered shirt' whatever."

ILG: "So they converged on him. I think McDonald was the first to get to him, wasn't he?"

JCB: "McDonald jumped off the stage and another policeman jumped off the stage and I don't know who followed him but they were tapping the patrons on the shoulder - some down the front - and telling them to get up and move. So they were actually clearing it. All the while, Oswald's looking at them and they're getting closer and closer to him."

ILG: "Were the house lights up?"

JCB: "They were on."

ILG: "Was the film running or stopped?"

JCB: "I think by now it was

"and we were just a couple of feet apart and he was actually looking at me when he said 'I'm not resisting arrest.'"

stopped."

ILG: "And then there was a bit of a scramble, a bit of a scrap?"

JCB: "Well, McDonald walked over to Oswald and tapped him and told him to get up. And then, you know, there's a lot of blur and I think I heard Oswald say 'It's over now' or something like that. Anyway, he got up and he's trying to hit McDonald and he knocked him back."

ILG: "Was that a fist, a punch?"

JCB: "Right. And a good one too. McDonald was not a small man. And about that time, he reaches under his shirt and pulls out a pistol. And

McDonald is getting back up and lunging for him and Oswald's got the gun. McDonald says he pulled the trigger but I feel I saw the hammer - um, McDonald, I believe, says that the hammer hit the fleshy part of his hand between the firing pin and the hammer. I know he had the gun out there."

ILG: "He's trying to shoot McDonald?"

JCB: "In the head. And then after that he got real excited. There was Oswald and the police falling over the chairs and whatnot and by this time, also, out come more policemen with their guns out and I got down and as they wrestled the gun from him, I'm looking up. There were several fists thrown in Oswald's general direction and he was handcuffed and led out and they led him out the aisle towards me and we were just a couple of feet apart and he was actually looking at me when he said 'I'm not resisting arrest.'"

ILG: "You heard him say that?"

JCB: "Right."

ILG: "Did he say that to you?"

JCB: "No - he said that in general but he was actually looking at me. I don't know if he kinda recognised me from the shoe store."

ILG: "And they took him out through the front entrance on to West Jefferson?"

JCB: "Yes. And as I was going to leave I was stopped by two FBI or plain clothes and they took my name and address."

ILG: "Once that was all finished, John, once they'd arrested Oswald, handcuffed him and taken him outside and spoken to you briefly, what did you do?"

JCB: "Well he was gone by the time I walked out. The police were all gone - and I walked back to my store."

THE DEALEY PLAZA ECHO

	Russian stamps and one 10 cent	
	U. S. Postage stamp #155	"
1	Blue plastic- 2 zipper compartments -	
	AWOL Bag	
1	Man's tan sportshirt "Briarloom	
	Traditionals by Enro"	
1	Pair man's gray slacks	
1	Pair man's faded gray slacks (torn & ripped)	
1	Pair man's blue shorts	
1	Pair man's white shorts	
1	White with flower design - light green	
	trim pillow case	
2	Red, white & pink stripe hand towels	
2	Red & white stripe bath towels	
2	White handkerchiefs	
1	2-tone gray with red stripe handkerchief	
1	White cloth - approx 18 x 24"	
3	Yellow & white wash rags	
4	White T-shirts	
4	White undershorts	
1	Pair socks - brown-white-tan	
1	Pair brown cloth work gloves	
1	Pair man's brown low quarter shoes	
1	Pair man's black low quarter shoes "John Hardy Brand"	
1	Pair man's shoes "Thongs style"	
1	Brown & yellow gold Russian make portable radio	
1	Unknown electronic device - Brown plastic case - broken	
	Arrested: Lee Harvey Oswald w/m/24	
	Dallas, Texas	
	Search Warrant dated 11/23/63, 1026 No. Beckley, Dallas, Texas	
	This inventory was made & invoice typed in FBI Office, Dallas, Texas	
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	PHOTOREPRODUCTION FROM	
	DALLAS MUNICIPAL ARCHIVES AND RECORDS CENTER	
	CITY OF DALLAS, TEXAS	
	If neither evidence nor recovered stolen property, write on face of this form in detail reason for police possession.	

Footnotes

1. These shoes are included in the list of property seized during the search of 1026 North Beckley on 23rd November 1963. See Commission Exhibit 2003 (page 285 of exhibit) on page 343 of Volume 24 of the 26 Volumes. They are described as *1 Pair man's black low quarter shoes "John Hardy Brand"*

They are pictured as CE 147 (16H 514) and also appear in the photograph at top right of page 167 of Robert Groden's *The Search for Lee Harvey Oswald*, published by Penguin Studio Books, 1995. They are the central of the three pairs of footwear. On Monday 10th March 1997, at my request, Mike Blackwell showed a copy of CE 147 to Johnny Brewer who immediately confirmed that it depicted the shoes he had sold to Oswald.

2. It could perhaps be considered suspicious that Brewer is able to recall this sale in such great detail. I am

satisfied, however, that there is nothing untoward here. If he were deliberately attempting to embellish his account, he would surely not be this vague concerning the date it occurred.

3. These two men have not been identified.

4. The Thomsen Furniture Mart occupied the building adjacent to the Texas Theatre. See page 150 of Robert Groden's *The Search for Lee Harvey Oswald*.

5. Refer to my own photograph, taken in November 1996, which shows the former Hardy shop in which Brewer worked (no. 213). It is now *Alicia's*, a clothing shop.

6. It was noticeable that Brewer continually referred to Mrs Postal as Julie rather than Julia.

7. For Brewer's affidavit, see CE 2003 (page 14 of exhibit) (24H 203).

Acknowledgements

I must, of course, acknowledge the assistance of my friends from Pflugerville, Mike Blackwell and Richard Bartholomew, in setting up this interview, and also of another good friend, Mark Rowe, for acting as my chauffeur on the return trip from Dallas to Austin. Finally, of course, I would thank Johnny Calvin Brewer for his hospitality, his frankness, his memory and, above all, his time and patience.

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